

The Operating Room Team

A team of healthcare professionals trained to fill specific roles manages every surgical procedure. The team is divided into two main components: the sterile team and the non-sterile team. The sterile team works within the sterile field that surrounds surgical procedures, while non-sterile team members support the surgical procedure before and after surgery, or manage patient care from outside the sterile field during surgery.

Role	Who Performs	Tasks
Sterile		
Surgeon	Surgeon, Dentist, Podiatrist	Perform surgery, manage care
First Assistant	Surgeon, Physician, PA, Resident, RNFA, Surgical Assistant	Provide exposure, control bleeding, close wounds, apply dressing
Scrub	Surgical Technologist, RN, LPN	Maintain sterile field, hand and count instruments, prepare supplies
Non-sterile		
Anesthesia Provider	Anesthesiologist, RN, Dentist, Physician, PA	Provide and maintain anesthesia, maintain vitals
Circulator	RN or Surgical Technologist	Patient advocate, patient comfort, manage team members, maintain sterile field, emergency assistance
Perianesthesia	RN, Surgical Technologist	Pre- and postoperative patient assessment and preparation

Surgical Technologists

Surgical Technologists support surgical procedures in the scrub, circulator or Perianesthesia roles. In Virginia, a Registered Nurse must act as circulator and circulating duties may not be delegated, limiting surgical technologists to the scrub role and some Perianesthesia duties. Registered nurses and licensed practical nurses also perform in these roles. The scrub role is generally considered a nursing role and surgical technologists are managed by nursing staff. The circulating nurse or nurse managers delegate tasks associated with the scrub role, though the Association of Surgical Technologists maintains that surgical technologists are independently qualified to perform the scrub role.

Before surgery, the scrub sets up the operating room and prepares equipment, supplies and instrument trays. The scrub shaves, drapes and helps to transport and position the patient. The scrub assists members of the sterile team to dress for surgery. During surgery, the scrub maintains a sterile environment, passes and collects instruments and supplies and performs flash sterilization on contaminated instruments. The scrub may read diagnostic charts or operate specialized equipment. The scrub prevents foreign object retention by maintaining instrument and sponge counts with the circulator. Following surgery, the scrub moves the patient to post operative care. The scrub also cleans the OR and prepares it for the next procedure.

Experienced surgical technologists may perform duties associated with the first assistant role such as holding retractors or providing suction, or may progress through experience to first assisting without obtaining additional credentials. As this occurs, the scrub person moves from performing delegated nursing duties to medical acts delegated by the surgeon.

Two organizations offer certifications for surgical technologists, the National Center for Competency Testing (NCCT) and the National Board of Surgical Technology and Surgical Assisting (NBSTSA). The NBSTSA requires graduation from an Accrediting Bureau of Health Education Schools (ABHES) or Commission on Accreditation of Allied Health Education Programs (CAAHEP) accredited surgical technologist program. The NCCT accepts graduates of unaccredited programs of USDOE recognized schools, or of any surgical technologist program if accompanied by one-year of experience.

There are over 450 accredited surgical technology programs, including seven in Virginia. Programs offer associate's degrees, certificates and diplomas.

Surgical Assistants

Surgical assistants act as first assistants in surgery, often performing significant portions of complex procedures. Surgical assistants work under the supervision of the surgeon, and perform tasks delegated by the surgeon. Surgeons, non-surgeon physicians, residents, registered nurses, licensed practical nurses and physician assistants also perform in the first assistant role.

The first assistant provides direct assistance to the surgeon before, during and after surgery. Before surgery, the first assistant confirms the type and site of the surgery, and selects equipment and diagnostics for the procedure. The first assistant ensures that OR staff have properly prepared the OR and the patient. Just before surgery, the first assistant inserts catheters and places tourniquets.

During the procedure, first assistants provide exposure by retracting tissues and organs and providing suction. They support hemostasis by tying off blood vessels, performing transfusions and performing chemical or electro-cauterization. They may harvest veins or bifurcate arteries for bypass surgeries. Once the procedure is complete, the first assistant closes wounds at all tissue levels, and applies dressings or drains to wounds. The first assistant also assists with all emergency procedures.

There are at least four separate organizations providing surgical assistant credentials. Minimum eligibility requirements vary. For example, the National Assistant at Surgery Council (NASC) accepts uncertified surgical technologists or LPNs who complete a distance-learning course and complete 135 procedures as an assistant. The NBSTSA accepts Certified Surgical Technologists who have two years of experience and have assisted in 350 cases. The National Surgical Assistant Association (NSAA) accepts veterans who completed a military training program that emphasized surgical assisting. All but one identified certification organization accepts candidates that have completed a CAAHEP accredited surgical assisting program without further requirements. CAAHEP accredited surgical assisting programs require at least 250 hours of lecture and laboratory learning and a supervised clinical preceptorship with assisting experience in at least 120 cases. All currently accredited programs are certificate programs.

Specialist Professions

Many allied health professionals support licensed surgeons within surgical specialties. These allied health professionals often obtain credentials that include the scrub and first assistant roles within their scope of practice, though limited to the particular specialty. Education and experience requirements for these credentials vary widely. Examples of allied health professionals that perform in scrub and first assistant roles include:

- Orthopedic Technologists
 - Orthopedic Physician's Assistant
 - Ophthalmic Assistant
 - Cardiovascular Technologist
 - Podiatric Medical Assistant
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